ECE Highlights

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Editorial

CEE : Aller de l'avant dans un monde qui change

A l'automne dernier, nombre de cadres du secrétariat de la CEE se retrouvaient à Chamonix pour une retraite de "management". Le premier exercice consistait à représenter graphiquement l'évolution dans le temps de l'image de la Commission. La plupart des participants convinrent de ce que, après le rebond des réformes en 1997, celle-ci avait retrouvé son rôle et qu'elle se situait actuellement sur un palier. L'animateur faisait alors remarquer qu'un palier, s'il n'était mis à profit pour s'interroger et initier de nouveaux travaux, annonçait inévitablement un déclin.

Yves Berthelot, Secrétaire exécutif de la CEE-ONU

Réconciliée avec tous ses gouvernements après la réforme, l'ensemble de ses activités étant jugées d'intérêt par tous ses membres, la CEE est une institution qui marche; mais, c'est aussi une institution « sans histoire ». Il est donc temps qu'elle s'interroge. Voici quelques questions.

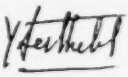
Dans mes précédents éditoriaux, j'ai souvent dénoncé le fossé qui se creusait en Europe entre les pays qui ont une croissance soutenue, avec des institutions suffisamment sophistiquées et efficaces pour réagir aux chocs et les surmonter, et ceux qui, trop dépendants des matières premières et avec des institutions faibles, partagent certains des problèmes des pays en développement. Comment la CEE peut-elle contribuer à renforcer les ponts qui franchissent ce fossé et, mieux, à le combler? Certainement en prêtant la plus grande attention aux questions qui intéressent les pays en marge de la dynamique européenne : séquence des réformes, politiques industrielles, maîtrise des technologies de l'information, accès au commerce électronique, accès aux marchés, exode des cerveaux. Le fait que depuis la réforme ceux-ci aient pratiquement cessé de faire des propositions de programme m'inquiète; faute d'écouter ces pays, notre institution court le risque de faillir à sa mission.

La CEE est, comme les gouvernements qu'elle sert, organisée en secteurs d'activité. C'est a priori une bonne chose, si l'on veut que les débats et les décisions prises aient une chance d'être suivis d'effet au niveau national. Cependant, chacun sait que les cloisonnements administratifs rendent difficile le traitement de problèmes qui relèvent de plusieurs départements ministériels. La CEE qui réunit six « ministères » sur deux étages d'un même bâtiment essaie d' être un moteur de la coopération interministérielle là où cela s'avère nécessaire. Je suis fier de ce que la Conférence de Vienne sur le Transport et l'Environnement ait eu lieu et plus encore qu'elle commence à être suivie d'effet. Mais que d'efforts à faire pour vaincre les inerties. D'autres domaines se prêteraient à ce genre de coopération. Pourquoi, par exemple, la Convention TIR n'utiliserait-elle pas systématiquement EDIFACT pour suivre les chargements et limiter les fraudes ? Pourquoi la simplification du passage aux frontières ne serait-elle pas menée conjointement par le Comité des Transports terrestres et par le Comité du Commerce ? Dans cette ligne, il serait facile d'identifier dans les programmes existants les complémentarités et d'en tirer profit pour plus d'efficacité.

Le monde change, dit-on à l'envi. Ces changements affectent non seulement les processus de production, les relations intersectorielles et les types de consommation mais, aussi, l'organisation de la société. La Commission est-elle à même, en mobilisant ses compétences et son expertise, de s'adapter aux changements et de répondre à de nouveaux besoins ? Certainement, et elle le fait déjà sur le plan technique. N'est-elle pas en train de mettre EDIFACT sur la Toile ? Cependant, répondre aux changements va plus loin. C'est d'abord les comprendre afin d'en prévoir les implications. Pour ce faire, la Commission doit mobiliser pleinement ses capacités d'observation, d'analyse et de dialogue avec les politiques et les scientifiques. Concrètement, le Survey au-delà de ses analyses macro-économiques reconnues devrait décrire la dynamique des secteurs de la CEE et les Comités conduire des débats sur les politiques et les évolutions à long terme.

Au moment de quitter la Commission, il est encourageant de voir tout le chemin parcouru depuis que l'existence même de la Commission était en cause et, plus encore, de voir qu'elle a la capacité de progresser pour mieux servir les pays de la région.

Le Secrétaire exécutif,
Commission économique pour l'Europe



Yves Berthelot

(For the English translation, see p. 12.)

Interview

The Regional Dimension of Globalization

Interview with Mr. Rubens Ricupero
Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

ECE Highlights: **In the context of the current globalization, what role do you see for the United Nations regional commissions, especially the Economic Commission for Europe?**

Mr. Rubens Ricupero: It is my conviction that the best way for countries to integrate into the globalized economy is through the regional approach. This is not only the best way but the only way. I think that the experience of the European Union has proven this. There are many studies that show that the decision of France and Italy to liberalize their trade systems and economies in the Dillon and Kennedy rounds was greatly facilitated by their experience in the European Common Market. I believe that what has been demonstrated in the case of western Europe also holds true for economies in transition in eastern and central Europe. It is also true for countries in Latin America, Asia or Africa. It is very difficult to jump from a purely national economy to an entirely global one. A regional economy is the natural transition. It is the space where countries can learn how to compete in the global environment. This is why for me regional cooperation is an absolutely indispensable element of any strategy of integration into the global economy. The regional commis-

Mr. Rubens Ricupero

sions, and particularly UN/ECE with its links between western and eastern Europe, can play a role in facilitating regional integration.

How do you see the future role of Europe in the process of globalization?

In line with what I said, I believe that the European experience is the most successful example one has seen so far of regionalism leading to economic growth and development and growing integration into the global economy. From the very beginning, the European movement was sensitive to the needs of the least developed regions and countries. In my view, the European Union has already historically proved its capacity to accommodate very heterogeneous regions in this process.

You recently had a meeting in Bangkok with the executive secretaries of the five regional commissions. What did you draw from this meeting?

I was extremely encouraged by this meeting. The idea was exactly to inject this regional dimension. As I already pointed out regionalization is not an alternative to globalization. I think it is the surest way of having a quality integration into the globalized economy. But in order to do that well you need to take into account the diversity of the situations. I understand this regional dimension in two different ways. One that is quite obvious is that development as a continuous process affects regions and continents in a different way. The development experience in South-East Asia is not the same as in sub-Saharan Africa, in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East or in Latin America. One must assess the diversity of the situations and institutions and how to cope with them. The second meaning is that regionalism is part of the therapy. As I mentioned in the response to your first question, regional integration is the best way for countries to learn to compete, to trade and to integrate into the world economy. I think that the discussion with the five regional commissions in Bangkok showed this very clearly. I believe that the regional commissions and UNCTAD should join forces and systematically explore how trade and investment are contributing to development. UNCTAD deals with these matters more at a generic level, but we need the commissions to give us the concreteness of the regional situation. On the other hand, I think the regional commissions could benefit from UNCTAD's global vision. My intention is to propose to my colleagues in the regional commissions that we continue the work started in Bangkok, in particular, that we explore how trade and investment can really promote quality development and integration into the global economy.

UNCTAD and ECE are sometimes working in similar areas. Do you see them as competing organizations, in particular as far as trade facilitation is concerned?

No, on the contrary. I believe that we have become more fully integrated in trying to have a workable division of labour between the two organizations. In the area of trade facilitation the demand is almost unlimited and neither ECE nor UNCTAD can alone meet these demands. The only way I see where we can at least meet some of them is to divide the tasks and for each organization to concentrate on areas where they have acquired experience. UNCTAD for example could focus on customs modernization or the management of the foreign debt.

A third actor in the area of trade facilitation is WTO. How will it be possible to avoid duplication?

WTO deals with the discussion and approval of norms that have an international value. It is a rule-making body which does not deal with the practical application of this system. This could be more of a problem for ECE which is engaged in developing rules for trade facilitation than for UNCTAD which is not involved in this activity. But the WTO and ECE mandates in this area are different. WTO is concerned with harmonizing regional rules. My own approach in this case would be to promote a good interaction between WTO and ECE in order to avoid WTO duplicating the work already elaborated in ECE. WTO should try to use ECE's rules to see to what extent they could be applied in other areas if they can be internationalized, but not try to change them.

Before joining the United Nations you were Minister of Finance in Brazil. How much did you use the regional commission then?

In Brazil and in Latin America in general, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has always played a central role because of its advocacy of the development theory of Latin American countries. However, ECLAC's role was somewhat reduced, particularly after the foreign debt crisis in the 1980s. But, recently I have seen a revival of its role because countries have seen that their economic problems will not be solved by macroeconomic fundamentals only. In most of the Latin American countries now, the economic teams that are in power concentrate on the macroeconomic side of the development equation, that is to fight inflation, to eliminate budget deficits and deficits in external accounts. They have been successful to different degrees. The assumption behind this was that sound macroeconomic fundamentals were necessarily sufficient conditions to promote development. Now people are saying it is a necessary condition, but it is not sufficient. You need policies to foster competitiveness, technology and enterprise development and ECLAC is again at the forefront. When I was Minister of Finance my first priority was to fight inflation and restore macroeconomic stability. Brazil had chronic inflation for 35 years. My predecessor, Mr. Cardoso and his team of economists, had put together a plan to combat inflation which I took over when I succeeded him. During my term we introduced a new currency and we brought down inflation. But I concentrated on fighting inflation. At the time, I used to say again and again that macroeconomic stability was only the beginning of the starting point of the initial phase after which we have to continue. I would use another image as well: that macroeconomic stability is only the foundation of the monument. After that you have to build it. I think ECLAC is doing this very well because they are contributing to changing the mentality in the region. ❐

ECE REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON 2000 REVIEW OF BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

European Governments Commit to Full Implementation of Platform, Declare Achievement of Gender Equality an International Priority

Mrs. Patricia Flor, Chairperson

The ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations 2000 Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was held in Geneva from 17 to 21 January 2000 gathering some 1,000 representatives from ECE member States, international institutions, experts, and NGOs. Its purpose was to provide a European input for a special session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" to be held in June in New York. The General Assembly gathering will focus on progress made in the wake of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing five years ago.

The session was organized in partnership with the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Preparations for the meeting were also made in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women in order to ensure the link between this regional review and the global review process.

NGO Working Session

Prior to the Meeting, an NGO Working Session was held from 17-18 January 2000. The very large presence of NGOs, some 600 participants from more than 250 organizations, showed their dynamism and involvement in all components of the session from panel discussions and debates to contributing inputs into the agreed conclusions.

Agreed Conclusions

The three-day session on women's issues concluded with the adoption by consensus of a series of agreed conclusions committing Governments of the region to full implementation of the Platform for Action they first pledged to enact at the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. The conclusions also call for special attention and support for women in European countries in transition to market economies. In addition, the agreement asserts that Governments bear the primary responsibility for putting the Beijing Platform for Action and its twelve areas of concern into effect and that the promotion of equality between women and men is a matter of priority for the international community.

Along with a preamble, the adopted document has sections on women and the economy, women and violence, women and girls in armed-conflict situations, women in power and decision-making, and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women—all of which were the subject of panel discussions during the meeting.

Closing Statements

The Regional Preparatory Meeting adjourned after hearing closing statements by the Chairperson, Patricia Flor and Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of UN/ECE.

Patricia Flor, Chairperson, said the meeting had accomplished a great deal in three days and that the progress achieved was largely a result of the cooperation and flexibility shown by national delegations and NGOs. With regard to women and the economy, it was clear that practical measures needed to be found to enable women and men to reconcile work and family obligations. On the subject of violence against women, it was apparent that zero-tolerance campaigns were necessary—such violence simply could not be accepted; in war and conflict situations, it was encouraging that international legal standards were being developed, but such measures would be of little use if they were not enforced. When it came to enhancing the role of women in positions of power and decision-making, she said, it was clear that the setting of targets and time-bound goals was a useful tool. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, finally, required not only announced Government commitment but sufficient funding.

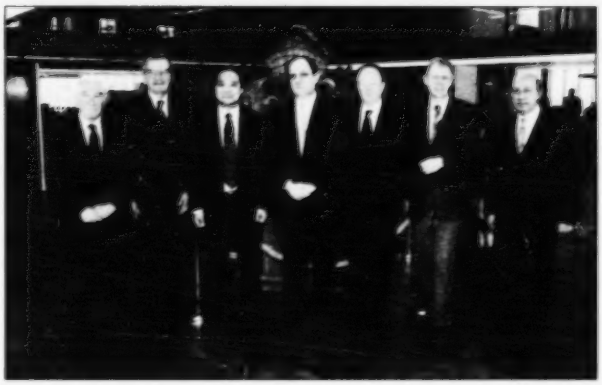
Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of UN/ECE, underlined the remarkable dialogue between governmental officials and NGOs throughout the meeting. He hoped it

would set a precedent for the participation of the civil society in future meetings. He quoted two sentences from the debate which would shape the action of ECE: "The mainstreaming of gender issues is the responsibility of men as well as women" and "Gender mainstreaming has to be organized". He was pleased to announce that he had had preliminary conversations with a number of member States to see how to secure resources for organizing gender mainstreaming in the core activities of ECE and to provide assistance to interested countries with economies in transition. In this endeavour he will be pursuing cooperation with NGOs, UNDP, UNIFEM, the Council of Europe and the European Commission which were fully involved in the preparation and conduct of that meeting. ❐

ITU joins MoU on electronic business in support of e-commerce

The International Telecommunication Union signed a Memorandum of Understanding on electronic business, joining three leading international standards-setting organizations already party to the MoU, namely the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE). In addition to the four signatories, CALS International and NATO CALS participate in implementation of the MoU as registered international user groups.

"The purpose of the MoU is to minimize the risk of divergent and competitive approaches to standardization, avoid duplication of efforts and avoid confusion amongst users", said Houlin Zhao, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau when signing the agreement on behalf of ITU. "The MoU will also provide greater intersectoral coherence in the field of electronic business, an important step considering the uptake of e-commerce", Zhao added.



Signatories of the MoU

Under the MoU, the four organizations undertake to review their standardization activities and develop a joint, coordinated programme for standards development and publication which will benefit the market place. ❐

Regional commissions' information officers meet in New York

Following a decision of ECOSOC that the United Nations regional commissions should share their experiences, a meeting of the regional commissions' information officers was held in New York in early March 2000. This meeting which was chaired by M. Yves Berthelot, the current Coordinator of the regional commissions, was attended by four of the five regional commissions' information officers as well as by staff of the Liaison Office for the Regional Commissions in New York. A meeting was also organized with the Department of Public Information (DPI) to which Mr. Kensaku Hogen, USG, DPI, participated.

The meeting of information officers revealed that the approach to information differed quite radically from one commission to another depending on the profile of each respective commission. The exchange of experience however led to the launching of a number of joint projects such as: a video clip on the regional commissions which should

be ready by next June, the preparation of a series of posters and postcards on the regional commissions, cooperation with CNN on statistics, and the preparation of new booklets presenting the joint achievements of all regional commissions.

The information officers also secured the promise from the Department of Public Information that the regional commissions would be made more visible on the United Nations Internet home page and at global events (Millennium Assembly, Hanover Fair). In the future, the regional commissions' information officers will participate in regional UNIC meetings so that strong links can be established. Radio and TV coverage will be increased as much as possible and DPI, New York will help disseminate the regional commissions' information in the United States. ❐

News in brief

How many industrial accidents does it take to strengthen international cooperation?

An appeal by the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), Yves Berthelot, as the Convention comes into force

What began as a mining accident in Baia Mare, in northern Romania, resulted in widespread water pollution with far-reaching consequences in the Danube's downstream countries. "This clearly demonstrates the threat that industrial accidents pose to our environment and the need for countries to work together to improve industrial safety", said the Executive Secretary of UN/ECE, Yves Berthelot.

Mr. Berthelot therefore welcomed the entry into force of the UN/ECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on 19 April 2000. Drawn up by UN/ECE as part of its pan-European environmental legal framework, the Convention aims to protect both human beings and the environment against industrial accidents.

"Although it is unfortunate that it takes an industrial accident of this scale to alert some Governments to the need for closer international cooperation, at least it is now clear that all UN/ECE countries must sign up to this Convention and apply it so that its full effect will be felt. I therefore appeal to those countries that are not yet parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents to draw up legislation so that they can ratify and implement the Convention as soon as possible", said Yves Berthelot. "This will ensure that in the future more industrial accidents are prevented and the impact of those that do happen can be limited." ❐

First legal framework for Internet

UN/CEFACT adopts revolutionary recommendations

At the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) meeting held in Geneva between 27 and 30 March 2000, a new standard form of agreement was adopted. "What is revolutionary about this agreement is first that it sets up some basic mechanics for electronic-commerce business to business and business to consumer transactions", said David Marsh, Legal Liaison Rapporteur to UN/CEFACT. "Second that it can be applied to all electronic media, be it Internet, e-mail, faxes, telexes. . ." The document defines a set of rules such as: how you acknowledge messages; when is a message legally received? Is it when it goes into the receivers' mailbox or when the sender originally sends it out? How and when should you respond to a message? When and how will a message be recognized as being valid so that it will be acceptable to a court? It also contains references to jurisdiction and dispute-resolution processes to be applied. The new interchange protocol tries to create a template, an environment, which allows electronic commerce to have a degree of safety in those areas where there are no clear guidelines to be applied. "It brings to the world of electronic commerce a simple process applicable to all electronic transmissions. It brings to business the option of creating a legal basis for future transactions", concluded Hans Hansell, Deputy Director of Trade, UN/ECE. ❐

Aftermath of the December windstorms in Europe's forests

Emergency clean-up work initiated, planning for future

ECE Timber Committee sets up information clearing house

The December storms caused major damage in many European forests to stands of trees, wildlife habitat, buildings, utilities, roads, etc. Foresters are now assessing the damage, initiating sanitation cuttings and planning for reforestation. Ms. Carol Cosgrove-Sacks, Director, UN/ECE Trade Division, states, "One of the important roles of the Timber Committee is to facilitate the transfer of information between countries on catastrophes in forests and their possible impacts and abatement. To this end we have established a new site under the Timber Committee Web site to share information and facilitate the recovery" (www.unece.org/trade/timber/).

European Governments, including France, Germany and Switzerland where substantial forest damage occurred, are preparing plans to assist with disaster relief. The consequences of the storms are far-reaching, both in time and in their impacts on forests and forest products markets. Current forest harvest plans will be modified to account for the newly fallen timber. New plans are being made for re-establishment of forests and wildlife habitat through natural regeneration and planting. ❐

Robot orders rocket to an all-time high

"Never before have so many orders for industrial robots been placed by industry, pointing towards an acceleration in the drive to automate", says Jan Karlsson of UN/ECE, which together with the International Federation of Robotics (IFR), regularly surveys the robot market.

Worldwide orders up 20 per cent....

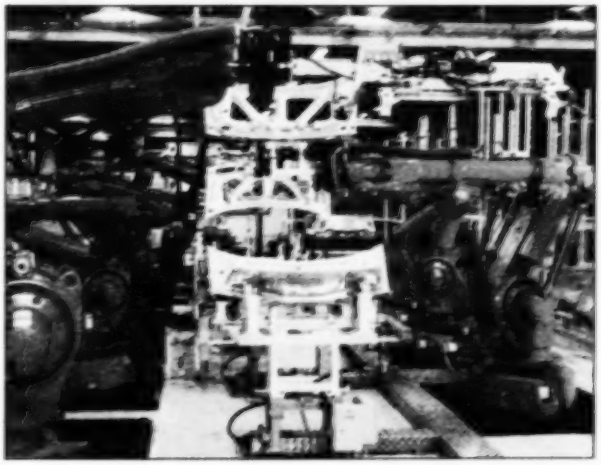
Worldwide orders for industrial robots surged 20 per cent in 1999 compared with 1998. Firms in North America led this drive to automate, as orders for robots skyrocketed by 60 per cent. While European businesses stepped up orders by a more modest 12 per cent, this was still impressive growth considering that a surge of 31 per cent had already taken place in 1998.

Led by automotive as well as food and other industries

The automotive industry continued to lead the drive to robotize, boosting orders by 24 per cent compared with 1998. The other sectors of manufacturing together increased orders by 14 per cent, most notably the food industry. Generally, industries exposed to strong international competition are investing in robots in order to remain competitive in increasingly global markets.

Robots will boost investment in 2000 and beyond

A large share of the orders placed in 1999 will not be delivered until the year 2000. As most robots installed today are part, and often the centrepiece, of integrated manufacturing systems, this points to continued high



investment not only in robotics but also in a broad range of non-robotic equipment, machines, computers, software and systems engineering required to complete these systems.

"Rapidly falling relative prices of robots and increased competition through globalization will spur continued high growth in robot investment in the years ahead", says Mike Wilson, Chairman of IFR. "We have only seen the first phase of the robotization drive, which has mainly focused on the automotive industry. The food industry and all other manufacturing industries as well as many non-manufacturing sectors will significantly step up their investment in robot systems", predicts Jan Karlsson, UN/ECE. ❐

Cross-sectoral statistical analysis in UN/ECE

Through the use of mapping technologies

A UN/ ECE seminar was held in February to explore the approaches of National Statistical Offices and other players in cross-sectoral statistical analysis using mapping technologies, to demonstrate the existing geographic information systems (GIS) applications in ECE and to explore the potential for new mapping technologies to improve statistical analysis across various sectors within ECE. The discussion at the Seminar was based on the presentations and documentation prepared by the Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, IGN, UNEP/GRID, the UN/ECE Transport Division, the UN/ECE Economic Analysis Division /PAU, and the UN/ECE Statistical Division. The Seminar showed that there is a potential in the ECE secretariat to further develop the use of GIS for statistical analysis. Mapping oriented cross-sector statistical analysis proved to be an important tool on many occasions for managers and policy makers at both national and international levels. Although the demand for such analysis is not always explicitly formulated by users yet, it is essential to continue the exchange of know-how and the research in this area. Based on the presentations and discussion at the Seminar, the ECE secretariat could consider establishing an interdivisional working group for this purpose. ❐

Just issued

Third Road Safety Week in the UN/ECE Region, 1-7 May 2000

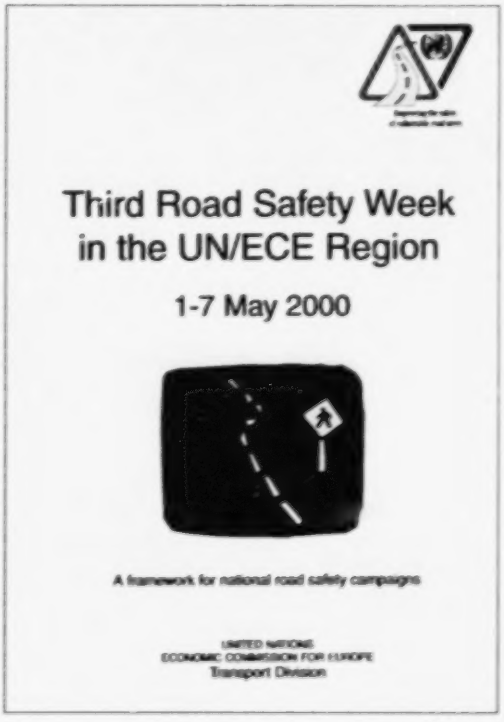
This brochure for the Safety Week gives information on the campaigns launched for this event which will focus on improving the safety of vulnerable road users. It also gives statistics on road accidents.

The Third Road Safety Week scheduled to be held during the week from 1 to 7 May 2000 will provide UN/ECE member Governments and interested organizations with an opportunity to launch simultaneous road safety campaigns with a common target and under a common slogan. The common target group for the Third Road Safety Week is VULNERABLE ROAD USERS. The common slogan is PARTNERSHIP ON THE ROAD INCREASES SAFETY which is considered as the natural and cost-effective way of improving road safety.

Many campaigns and activities are scheduled to be launched in the context of the Third Road Safety Week. Particularly interesting events, with a potentially large impact on road safety of vulnerable road users, are, for example: a two-day symposium on road traffic safety with the theme "Vision Zero—Traffic without Danger" to be organized during the Week in Switzerland; a car crash demo—also in Switzerland; a conference to be organized under Government auspices in the Russian Federation on the prevention of injuries to children and pedestrians in road traffic; a large country-wide road safety campaign in Romania, and also the Third RSW in the United Kingdom co-sponsored by the Government and strongly supported by the police force, to be extensively covered by the media, and highlighted by the launching of the Week in May, and addressed by high ranking government officials.

UN/ECE has launched a special Web site on the Third Road Safety Week, which can be accessed at the address ***http://www.unece.org/trans/roadsafe***. This Web site gives complete information on the Third RSW including detailed activities to be undertaken by the various countries.

Price: Free of charge ❐



Study on Underground Gas Storage in Europe and Central Asia

A comprehensive interregional study, which was prepared under the auspices of the Working Party on Gas, deals with the whole range of technical, economic and regulatory issues related to underground gas storage (UGS), such as new and emerging technologies, current status and potential UGS, including international UGS, cost of storage and regulatory framework, outlook and main trends of UGS and gas markets developments up to the year 2020.

ECE/ENERGY/39/Rev.1, United Nations publication, Sales No. GV.E.99.0.27, ISBN 92-1-101012-8, price: US$ 30. ❐

The United Nations System
How it is now and how it should be in the future

Kamil Idris
Michael Bartolo

The former President of South Africa, H.E. Nelson Mandela states in the Foreword that "the debate on the reform of the United Nations System must move beyond the cost-effectiveness and efficiency issues, to that of relevance".

The President of Malta, H.E. Guido de Marco, a former President of the General Assembly, in the Preface calls for a reform that requires "not merely tinkering with the institutional set-up of the Organization but rather a reorientation of the principles projected in the Charter so as to enable them to be applied to current realities".

The authors respond by giving a blueprint for a relevant United Nations, more in line with the Charter, emphasizing wider participation in its work, and the supremacy of its General Assembly.

This is followed by a vision of a United Nations, supported by an Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), transformed into a Policy and Coordination Board (PCB), that would bring out the best in a United Nations System that would include—in addition to the specialized agencies—the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other global, regional and subregional organizations, which share the same objectives of peace, security, and fair and equitable development for all the peoples of the World.

Published by Kluwer Law International. ❐

A Better United Nations for the New Millennium
The United Nations System - How it is now and how it should be in the future
Kamil Idris
Michael Bartolo
Kluwer Law International

In-house Happenings

Internet: February 2000 a record month

http://www.unece.org/

Even though the month of February had 29 days, the hits on the UN/ECE home page reached an all-time high. With 1,673 millions hits, an increase of 28 per cent as compared with January and of 52 per cent compared to February 1999. As a matter of comparison the UN/ECE Home site received 163 per cent more hits than UNCTAD, 25 per cent more than UNHCR, but 40 per cent less than WTO. People look at the site every day of the week with a peak on Mondays. Fifty-five per cent of the visits take place during European working hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from which it might be interpreted that 45 per cent of the hits come from outside Europe. The most visited parts of the UN/ECE site are trade, transport, statistics, CEFACT, information and environment. A number of congratulations have been received for the new design of the site. ❐

ECE Monthly:
A newly born newsletter

At the request of the ad hoc session of the Commission, the UN/ECE Information Service is issuing a short newsletter every month which mentions the major forthcoming meetings for that period as well as workshops and seminars with a few words of explanation and a focal point to contact within the UN/ECE secretariat. Whenever space permits it also includes recent publications and any other interesting events. You may find *ECE Monthly* on the Internet http://www.unece.org/. ❐

A visible UN/ECE

The UN/ECE Information Service has acquired a number of displays to be used for exhibitions. Three of them are related to ECE as a whole, while two others are linked to ECE's environmental activities. These displays have already been used for the ECE stand at the WMO 50th anniversary exhibition and for the EDIFACT Forum in late March. ❐

The UN in your daily life *issued for the Hanover fair*

The UN in your daily life: the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) has been issued in German for the Hanover Fair which will open in May 2000. This publication, which has been reproduced in around 50,000 copies now exists in English, French, Russian and German. ❐

ECE and WMO for kids

As UN/ECE is closely cooperating with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) especially on matters related to the environment, the Information Services of WMO and UN/ECE decided to launch a project for kids for

the 50th anniversary of WMO. This project, supervised by the ECE Information Service and fully financed by WMO, has taken the shape of a book called *WMO in your daily life* in full colour which contains a chapter on ECE. ❐

ECE Highlights *on Internet*

You may now find *ECE Highlights* on the Internet. Its address: http://www.unece.org/highlights/highlights.htm, or simply go to the ECE home page http://www.unece.org and look on the left-hand side, there is a hyper link to *ECE Highlights*. ❐

The United Nations for kids

A few months ago the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), in cooperation with the UN/ECE Information Service launched a quiz for teenagers. This quiz which contains 17 questions on the United Nations in general and four on UN/ECE was widely distributed. UNIC Tashkent received 3,000 answers out of which 200 were good ones. The winner will receive a trip to Geneva with his parents. The second prize is a computer and a number of other prizes will be awarded. The drawing of the winners will take place in Tashkent on 25 April 2000 in the presence of Mr. Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of UN/ECE, the Minister of Education of Uzbekistan, the Swiss Ambassador in Tashkent and a number of other high-level officials. Up until now, in the words of one of the information officers in Tashkent, Ms. Nigina Baikabulova, "This quiz has generated an impressive interest of the public for UN matters. We have received a lot of letters from kids with very touching testimonies on how much they loved the UN. Furthermore, the publication *The UN in your daily life: the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* (UN/ECE) has become a real best-seller". The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, will send a personal letter to all the winners to congratulate them.

At a recent meeting in New York, UNIC Chiefs of the UN/ECE region were very interested in launching similar quizzes in their own countries. Discussions are going on, for example, between the ECE Information Service and UNIC Moscow for a similar exercise. ❐

ECE Calendar

Selected events

May

2	Spring Seminar on "From Plan to Market: the transition process after ten years"
3-5	FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
3-5	Seminar on Measurement of the Quality of Employment
15-19	Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods
22-26	Diplomatic Conference for the Adoption of a European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterway
23-26	Meeting of Specialized Section on Coordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
29-31	Steering Committee of the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project
29-31	Seminar on Integrated Statistical Information Systems and Related Matters (ISIS 2000) (Riga, Latvia)

June

5-8	Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training
6	Joint Meeting on Transport and the Environment
13-15	CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS (OECD, Paris, France)
19-22	Meeting of Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit)
19-23	COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT and Forum on Electronic Commerce for Transition Economies in the Digital Age
19-23	Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport

July

3	Meeting on Radioactive Contaminated Metallurgical Scrap
3-5	Meeting of the Signatories to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Dubrovnik, Croatia)
4-7	World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29)
5-7	Seminar on Agricultural Economic Statistics (Luxembourg)

WHERE TO ORDER

The publications listed with sales prices may be ordered from: **United Nations Bookshop, Sales Unit, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland** and a number of bookstores in the ECE region. Send cheque or money order in US$ made payable to: UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS.

Those publications listed without a sales price may be obtained from the Information Officer, Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

Editorial

ECE: moving forward in a changing world

Last autumn, several senior staff members from the ECE secretariat met in Chamonix for a "Management Retreat". The first exercise consisted of plotting on a graph how ECE's image had evolved over time. The majority of the participants agreed that, after the impetus of the reforms in 1997, ECE had again found its role and had now reached a plateau. The Retreat's facilitator remarked that if that stage was not put to good use to question and initiate new activities, a decline would inevitably follow.

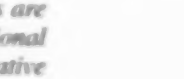
Reconciled with all its Governments after the reform, the whole of ECE's activities being considered of interest to all its member States, ECE is an institution which functions, but it is also an institution "without problems". It is thus time for it to ask itself some hard questions.

In my preceding editorials, I have often denounced the widening gap in Europe between those countries that enjoy sustained growth, sufficiently sophisticated and efficient institutions to react to shocks and be able to surmount them, and those that are too dependent on raw materials, have weak institutions and share some of the problems of the developing world. How can ECE contribute to bridging this gap, or even better to eradicating it. Certainly by paying the highest attention to the questions which are of interest to the countries at the margin of European dynamism: the sequence of reforms, industrial policies, mastering information technology, access to electronic trade and markets, and the brain drain. Since the ECE reform the fact that these countries have practically stopped making programme proposals worries me, because by not listening to them our institution runs the risk of failing in its mission.

The Commission, like the Governments it serves, is organized according to its sectoral activities. This is in principle a good thing if its debates and decisions are to have a chance of being followed up at the national level. However, everyone knows that administrative compartmentalization makes it difficult to deal with problems which involve several ministerial departments. ECE, which brings together six "ministries" on two floors of the same building, tries to be an engine for intersectoral cooperation whenever it proves to be necessary. I am proud that the Vienna Conference on Transport and the Environment took place and, even more so, that follow-up has commenced. But it required much effort to overcome inertia and arrive at this point. Other sectors of activity could lend themselves to this type of cooperation. For example, why doesn't the TIR Convention systematically use EDIFACT to follow loadings and limit fraud? Why isn't the facilitation of border crossings carried out jointly by the Committee on Inland Transport and the Committee on Trade? Similarly, it should be easy to identify complementarities in the existing programmes of work and draw on them to increase efficiency.

As we are constantly reminded, the world changes. Changes affect not only production processes, cross-sectoral relations and consumption habits, but also the organization of society. Is the Commission able to adapt to these changes and respond to new needs by mobilizing its skills and expertise? Certainly, and it does this at the technical level already. Isn't it in the process of putting EDIFACT on the Web? However, responding to changes must go further than this. First of all, one must understand them in order to foresee their implications. To do this the Commission must fully use its capabilities of observation, analysis and dialogue with policy makers and scientists. Concretely, the Survey should describe the dynamics of the different ECE sectors in addition to its well-known macroeconomic analysis, and ECE's Committees should hold debates on policies and long-term perspectives.

As I am about to leave the Commission, it is encouraging to look back on the road that has been travelled since ECE's very existence was put into question and even more so to see that it has the ability to move ahead to better serve the countries of the region.



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ECE Highlights provides a round-up of news and information on major ECE events and publications and is available free of charge from the Information Officer.

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